

“The Four Ideals”: A Contemplative Exercise by Gurdjieff

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Abstract

Nous présentons ici des données inédites en provenance de G.I. Gurdjieff (c. 1865–1949), appelées “exercice des quatre idéaux”, et tentons de les situer dans le “Travail” institué par celui-ci. Nous voudrions faire remarquer qu’un tel exercice possède un caractère singulier parmi les diverses traditions mystico-religieuses, dans la mesure où nous ne connaissons pas d’autre exemple d’une pratique visant à attirer dans le propre corps de l’élève, d’une zone située par delà l’atmosphère terrestre, de substances élaborées à la surface de notre planète. De telles substances émanent censément des prières adressées par les hommes à certains “idéaux”. La mise en œuvre, par Gurdjieff, d’“exercices contemplatifs internes” compte parmi les aspects les moins étudiés de sa méthode. Le présent article est le premier d’une série visant à attirer l’attention des universitaires sur ces points particuliers.

Keywords

Gurdjieff; “Four Ideals”; Mysticism; prayer; contemplation

Part One: The “Four Ideals” Exercise

1.1. *Background*

It has been suggested that the Greek-Armenian George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (c. 1865–1949) can be considered a mystic, and that his ideas and methods are intentionally conducive to the mystic range of experiences.¹ There, it was argued that Gurdjieff, like the Neoplatonist Plotinus, explained mystical experiences by reference to the action of an internal human faculty which perpetually perceives objective reality, unlike the faculties usually available to us. These faculties, our minds and emotions, are so often disordered if not turbulent that it is impossible for us, in our ordinary consciousness, to be aware of the objective reality which

¹) Azize, ‘Solar Mysticism in Gurdjieff’, *passim*.

our “nous” (in Plotinus’ terms) or “higher intellectual centre” (in Gurdjieff’s system), contemplate.² Gurdjieff’s ideas and methods aimed to allow a connection between the higher intellectual centre and the ordinary faculties, and thereby form a ‘higher-being-body’ or ‘soul’ which could survive physical death. The pertinent method includes overcoming negative emotions, practicing self-discipline (including sacred movements,³ which although perhaps unique could be recognized by any major spiritual tradition), and remembering oneself. Then it is possible for one to become ‘a particle, though an independent one, of everything existing in the great universe.’⁴ Interestingly, Plotinus followed Plato in placing the ‘higher part of the soul’ in the head. This is where Gurdjieff placed the higher intellectual centre.⁵

The “Four Ideals Exercise” (“FIE”) was an internal contemplative exercise which Gurdjieff gave George M. Adie (1901–1989) in 1948.⁶ It comprises two parts: a relatively lengthy introduction, and an instruction. Like most of Gurdjieff’s internal exercises, Gurdjieff gave it orally, never, to the best of my knowledge, reducing it to writing.

By “internal contemplative exercise”, I mean first a practice performed without making any bodily movement once a posture has been assumed and the exercise commenced. The exercitant would invariably, if not always, attempt one of Gurdjieff’s internal exercises sitting unmoving with eyes closed. According to Dr John Lester (1919–1999), who visited Gurdjieff regularly between 1946 and 1949, he and other pupils learned the exercises in Gurdjieff’s Paris apartment, seated with Gurdjieff upon the floor.⁷ Second, despite their interior and contemplative nature, these tasks are nonetheless aptly described as “exercises”: activities which require exertion to achieve a benefit, even if the exertion is a subtle one of the attention before all else. John G. Bennett (1897–1974)⁸ wrote: ‘Gurdjieff showed me a sequence of exercises for the control and transformation of the psychic ener-

² Azize, ‘Solar Mysticism in Gurdjieff’, 21–24.

³ Azize, ‘Gurdjieff’s Sacred Dances and Movements’, *passim*.

⁴ Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales*, 183.

⁵ Azize, ‘Solar Mysticism in Gurdjieff’, 24. The terms from Gurdjieff’s unique vocabulary will be addressed below. It might be mentioned, for the sake of abundant clarity, that there is no connection or similarity between Gurdjieff’s “ideals” and Plato’s “ideas” except that of coincidence. Gurdjieff’s ideals are dealt with below. The study of Plato’s ideas is a complex one, but after even a brief reading of *Parmenides* 130A–134C, one can see that Plato’s “ideas” do not represent persons, but qualities of things and concepts, and that people do not pray to them, and one cannot take energy from them (as one does with Gurdjieff’s ideals).

⁶ For Adie, see Adie and Azize, *George Adie*, *passim*.

⁷ Oral communication to the author, probably in 1996.

⁸ For Bennett as a pupil of Gurdjieff, see Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 238.

gies in man.⁹ This aptly describes Gurdjieff's internal contemplative exercises in so far as they are known to me, and as they were taught by Adie. Gurdjieff did have other exercises which were inner but not contemplative, as I have described these, but they fall outside the purview of this article.¹⁰

This side of Gurdjieff's practical method is virtually unknown outside of some of the Gurdjieff groups. The three leading biographies of Gurdjieff, and the synopsis by Michel de Salzmann (1923–2001),¹¹ are entirely silent as to the existence of these exercises.¹² Although one would not expect a thorough and complete treatment in the encyclopaedic *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, it is nonetheless significant that the two pertinent entries are deficient. One of these, "Gurdjieff Tradition", mentions contemplative traditions such as the Pre-Socratics and Hesychastic Christianity. It then refers to a 'Gurdjieffian practice of *guided meditation*' which is difficult to describe, but is 'far from being a technique or method,' and is representative of 'the contemplative aspect of life that is embedded in the heart of all the religious traditions of the world.' This "guided meditation" is said to have been 'gradually emphasized and developed by Jeanne de Salzmann in the 1960s.' The pupil is said to seek a 'quality of seeing and an embodied presence that sustains and supports his attempt to know and directly experience what he is, including both his limitations and possibilities.'¹³ In what respects, one may ask, was the Pre-Socratic tradition "contemplative", and what does it mean to say that Gurdjieff's tradition "corresponds" to it? Further, it will become apparent in this article that Gurdjieff himself, who died in 1949, established a line of contemplative exercises based on extensive and consistent theoretical and practical research, which bear no resemblance to what is described (and vaguely described, too) of de Salzmann's "guided meditations".

The other article in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, titled "Gurdjieff", cryptically states:

⁹) Bennett, *Witness*, 208.

¹⁰) The author is presently preparing a book which will provide full details of these exercises. However, some of the exercises were published, without commentary, in Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, see the index under "exercises".

¹¹) Michel de Salzmann, Gurdjieff's natural son by Jeanne de Salzmann, effectively directed the Institut Gurdjieff after his mother's death in 1990. See Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 235.

¹²) See Webb, *Harmonious Circle*, Moore, *Gurdjieff*, and Taylor, *G.I. Gurdjieff*. Although Gurdjieff's use of fasting is little remarked, Moore's index entry "Gurdjieff: Methodology" lists "fasts" but not "exercises" (411). Neither does Moore's reference to Gurdjieff's "*pratique* for the mobilization and direction of attention" (342) mention exercises. De Salzmann's article was published in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade, ed.-in-chief, NY: Macmillan, 1987, see now <http://ouspensky.org/msalzmann1.htm> on 4 September 2012. De Salzmann was director of the Institut Gurdjieff in Paris.

¹³) Needleman, 'Gurdjieff Tradition', 451–452.

Abjuring lop-sided genius, Gurdjieff promotes the harmonious development of head, heart, and hand, respectively supporting the intellectual, emotional, and physical temperaments through his writings, music, and movements. He nevertheless issues an ubiquitous demand for mobilised attention. Contemplatively deployed, this ever-refined attention builds a progressively deeper awareness of nuances of one's physical existence—approaching the Cartesian mind/body mystery in profound interior silence, while putatively opening the psyche to benign supernal influences.¹⁴

The key phrase may be “contemplatively deployed”, which of course means “deployed in a contemplative manner”, but here seems to mean “when applied to the practice of contemplation”. I do not, however, pretend to understand what is referred to by the phrase “nuances of one's physical existence”: a “nuance” is a slight and subtle variation, especially in expression. Neither does the writer define “psyche” or “supernal influences”, and, given the opaque quality of his writing, some explanation seems necessary. After considering the terms of the FIE below, it should be apparent that this entry does not at all correspond to the quality of Gurdjieff's spiritual exercises.

Many of these exercises have been published without commentary, chiefly by way of incidental report when setting out the text of Gurdjieff's group meetings, however they have not yet been studied.¹⁵ Further, the exercises are referred to, albeit briefly, in several sources: for example, Rina Hands (d. 1994) mentions being given an exercise by Gurdjieff in Paris in either 1948 or 1949, but discloses nothing of its nature.¹⁶ However, Kenneth Walker (1882–1966)¹⁷ was a little more forthcoming, saying enough to alert scholars to something of the nature of the exercises:

After taking our coffee Gurdjieff would talk to me about some exercise that I had to do, such as an exercise for ‘sensing’ various parts of the body. Or it might be a method by which I should become more aware of the energy I was continually throwing away. He suggested that I should draw an imaginary circle around myself, beyond which my attention and my energies should never be allowed to stray, so long as I was engaged in doing this exercise.¹⁸

¹⁴) Moore, ‘Gurdjieff’, 449.

¹⁵) Many can be found in the transcripts of Gurdjieff's Paris meetings of the 1940s: see the index entry for “exercises” in Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, 180. Further, De Salzmann approved the publication of exercises in Gurdjieff, *Life Is Real*. Exercises were published in de Salzmann's *The Reality of Being*, see the index entry “exercise”, 306. Also, Sinclair published Gurdjieff's “Wellington Hotel” injunction, which, as we shall see, expresses part of the basis of this Four Ideals Exercise: Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 231.

¹⁶) Hands, *Diary of Madame Egout*, 71.

¹⁷) “Kenneth Walker (d. 1966) was an eminent surgeon, fellow of innumerable Royal Societies, and three times Hunterian Professor ...”, Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 401.

¹⁸) Walker, *The Making of Man*, 126.

However, as a general rule, those who were taught the exercises have treated them as secret if not privileged knowledge, which could possibly cause harm if used unwisely. For example, Bennett, who learned many exercises directly from Gurdjieff, stated: 'I am reluctant to describe any of Gurdjieff's spiritual exercises, as I am sure that they should never be undertaken without supervision by some experienced guide.'¹⁹

I am not convinced that the stated reason is sound, or that the risk of danger is so real as to justify silence. First, I am not aware of any instance where anyone has used the exercises to their detriment, if anything, I would categorise my experience as being the opposite. Second, the publication of Gurdjieff's ideas marked a significant departure from the rule of secrecy, and disseminating the details of his exercises is arguably of lesser magnitude than the publication of the ideas in *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) and Gurdjieff's own works. Third, militating against secrecy is the desirability of making Gurdjieff's exercises better known. Most of Gurdjieff's other methods are in the public arena where scholarship and the general public can make use of them. Some of Gurdjieff's methods were presented in Part Four of the recent Brill *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, his Enneagram, piano music, sacred dances and P.D. Ouspensky's idea of eternal recurrence (which was influenced by Gurdjieff).²⁰

1.2. *The Four Ideals Exercise ("FIE")*

The FIE has not previously been published, but many of the ideas which Gurdjieff incorporates into the exercise have been. The FIE is significantly more detailed than any of those hitherto made available in the public domain, and illuminates certain aspects of Gurdjieff's thought and methods. Therefore, publication of this exercise, with an academic analysis, may both allow the Gurdjieff exercises to become better known, and to expand our understanding of Gurdjieff's methods and ideas, filling out what I might call the "spiritual" or "religious" aspect of Gurdjieff's system.

We can date Adie's reception of the exercise, by virtue of appendices 1 and 2, which are notes Adie made in September 1949. Being one of the executors of Adie's will, I found the material in appendices 1 to 4 amongst his papers after his death in Sydney in 1989. By virtue of the notation at the top of Appendix 1, we can safely say that the notes were made on or after 1 September 1949, but before 29 October 1949 when Gurdjieff died. The notes, made on scraps of paper, tally

¹⁹ Bennett, *Witness*, 200.

²⁰ Cusack and Norman, *Handbook of New Religions*, Blake, 'Gurdjieff and the Legominism of Objective Reason', Petsche, 'G.I. Gurdjieff's Piano Music', and Azize, 'Gurdjieff's Sacred Dances'.

the days Adie had thus far spent with Gurdjieff in Paris. As Adie saw Gurdjieff after 1 September,²¹ the dating seems secure. Each side of the paper refers to an exercise called “Four Ideals”. In Appendix 1, we read, *inter alia*:

Oct 1.48. Subjective Exercise Ideals. 5 months
to Mch. 49.

Appendix 2 includes the following note:

Oct 1. 1948. subjective ex. till Mch. 1

I understand this to mean that on 1 October 1948, Gurdjieff taught Adie a “subjective exercise”, which means an exercise for a specific individual rather than for a group,²² and that Adie worked with this exercise for five months, until some point in March 1949. The notations distinguish when Adie and his wife (Helen) were given exercises (e.g., these notes show that Adie and his wife received the exercise “I Am” at different times). Therefore, it would appear that she was not given the FIE by Gurdjieff himself, one of several indications that Gurdjieff gave the FIE to few of his pupils. Nonetheless, it seems to me that Helen made one of the handwritten amendments to Appendix 3.

Briefly, in this exercise, students attempt to make contact with four “ideals” (Christ, Buddha, Muhammad and Lama), and introduce into their own (i.e., the students’ own) bodies certain “higher substances” which are produced when worshippers pray or address themselves to those “ideals”, concepts which I deal with below.

Our direct pieces of evidence for the FIE are Adie’s written notes of the exercise, a diagram which George Adie made, almost certainly, under Gurdjieff’s instructions in 1948 (appendices 3 and 4 respectively), and a short reference by Bennett. Other writings to be discussed below reveal ideas and methods so close to the Four Ideals exercise that they make my ascription of the exercise to Gurdjieff plausible.

²¹ Adie’s presence with Gurdjieff after 1 September 1949 is independently attested for 7, 8, 10 and 11 October 1949: Bennett and Bennett, *Idiots in Paris*, 108, 109, 112, 113, 115 and 116.

²² Adie said, in an unpublished meeting of 11 June 1980: “As far as exercises are concerned, there are objective exercises and subjective exercises. The objective exercises are ones that affect everybody in the same way, or could affect everybody in the same way, and everybody may use them. The subjective exercises, as you can see, will be specially suited to the person according to their requirements at the time, and how much they have understood—the level, as it were, of their understanding. And that will be measured from time to time ...”. See also Claustres, *La Prise* 134 = *Becoming Conscious*, 152, that Gurdjieff would simultaneously give exercises for the individual and for the group.

1.3. *Adie's Text of "The Four Ideals"*

The first page of Adie's text of "The Four Ideals", our chief direct source for the exercise, is Appendix 3. A two-page typed document on two foolscap sheets, it bears handwritten corrections at five places on page 1, and hand-drawn brackets at one place on the second page.²³ The exercise reads (incorporating the Adies' corrections and editing, and making insignificant changes to layout and punctuation):

On earth all people have an ideal which they situate far off in space, high above themselves. Towards this ideal they send their emanations. They pray to it, they stretch towards it, their emanations mount towards it. Their emanations do not all have the same force. Some of them can hardly rise at all, others go further, further even than the atmosphere of the earth, yet others mount almost to the very ideal.

The emanations on leaving the earth are dispersed, then they mount, further on they collect together to form at a certain level above the atmosphere of the earth a sort of reservoir or foyer of substances.

²³) The handwritten corrections to page 1 are as follows:

1. In the first paragraph, sixth line, the first two letters of a word, perhaps "cerdly" (sic), have been overwritten so that it reads "hardly".
2. In the first paragraph, seventh line, the two letters of a word, perhaps "to" have been overwritten so that it reads "of".
3. In the third paragraph, lines two and three, the words "and the earth" in line 3 are altered to "the earth and", circled, and linked by an arrow to a point in line 2.
4. In the third paragraph, sixth line, the word "to", which appears after the word "determination" is struck out.
5. In the final paragraph, second line, the word "parts" is crossed through and the word "limbs" interlineated.

To my eye, the third correction was definitely made by George Adie. The fifth handwritten amendment is made in a different and darker ink and perhaps, also, a different hand. It seems to me to be Helen Adie's hand. The first, second and fourth corrections appear to be in the same dark ink as was used for the fifth correction. I cannot be sure who made them, but I think it was Helen Adie, as it is likely that she made all the corrections in the same, darker pen. I would conjecture that Helen Adie typed up the document, made these two simple typographical corrections, then struck out the obsolete "to" (probably present in the original translation due to a literal rendering of the French infinitive), and revised the translation of the word "parts" to "limbs", while Adie made the more substantial editorial change in a different pen. Helen Adie often typed up confidential matters for Adie, at least into the 1970s, so this scenario is not unlikely. I have viewed a handwritten English language original of appendix 3. I recognised the handwriting of the English as being Adie's ("the English draft"). I do not know where the English draft is now, but I suspect that it has been misplaced.

We represent to ourselves that this foyer of substances is situated midway between the earth and the point of concentration which represents the ideal of the believers. The ideal himself is too far for an unprepared man to be able to enter into contact with him, but the man can, if he tries with determination enter into contact with this foyer of substances formed from the concentration of the vibrations sent by the believers towards their ideal and the man can assimilate these substances and accumulate them in himself. He can do it by establishing through the concentration of his will a connection in the form of a line or thread between this foyer and some part or other of his own body.

The exercise is given to achieve this aim. We choose four ideals: Muhammad, Christ, Buddha, Lama. We represent that their essence exists somewhere in space, in a place situated above the country where they lived:

Muhammad	above Mecca and Medina
Christ	above Jerusalem
Buddha	above India
Lama	above Tibet

In representing to ourselves each of these ideals, the thought goes immediately in the direction in space where the ideal is situated. The exercise consists in establishing a contact between one of the limbs of the body and the foyer of substances formed by the vibrations of the faithful in the direction of the ideal.

Now follows the second part of the exercise:

Breath in air consciously while drawing into yourself the substances accumulated in the limbs so that it can flow to meet the air which you are breathing in. It mixes with the air by itself, at the level of the breast. Then pour it into the sex organs.

I AM, in two parts.

With “I” feel the sex organs, with “AM” fill up the seven parts of the body one after the other.

- 1 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” with the substance accumulated in them fill up the right leg by pouring into it this substance
- 2 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” fill up the left leg
- 3 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” refill up the lower part of the abdomen
- 4 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” fill up the whole of the abdomen
- 5 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” fill up the torso
- 6 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” fill up the two arms and the shoulders

- 7 “I” feel the sex organs
“AM” fill up the head

Then “I AM” *several times* “I” am conscious of the whole of the body with a *feeling* centred in the solar plexus. “AM” again am conscious of the whole of the body, with a *sensation* centred in the vertebral column.

After that, rest ten or fifteen minutes in a collected state, that is to say, do not allow thought or feeling or organic instinct to pass outside the limit of the atmosphere of the body. Rest contained so that your nature can assimilate in calmness the results deposited in you, which otherwise would be lost in vain.

1.4. *Adie’s “Ideal” Sketch*

This is Appendix 4. It was made on headed note paper from the Belfast Hotel in Paris, where Adie invariably stayed when visiting Gurdjieff in Paris in 1948 and 1949. It is written in Adie’s hand, and was drawn and annotated in blue ink. Its contents pertain only to part 1 of the FIE. The table below contains the original French text without correction, my translation, and a description of the document.

Table 1. Adie’s “Ideal” Sketch

<i>Position</i>	<i>Notation</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Top	“Ideal”	Beneath the word “Ideal” is a circular object, presumably the unreachable ideal, which is made up of a spiral of lines starting from the centre.
Mid-top	“CONCENTRA- TIONS DES VIBRATIONS DES CROYANTS”	These words (“Concentrations of the vibrations of the believers”) are written at the base of the five parallel lines which lead from a lower sphere to the upper sphere marked “Ideal”.
Base-top		A lower sphere made up of several concentric circles. Whereas the upper sphere is, perhaps, the unreachable sphere, this sphere, the summit of the “concentration”, is within grasp. ²⁴
Top-middle		15 lines lead into the lower sphere (base-top) from the lower levels of the diagram.
Middle	“ATMOSPHERE”	A concave line, almost parallel to the earth line below, is superimposed over the lines which lead into the lower sphere from the levels below.

²⁴ I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for considerably improving my description at this point.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Notation</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Lower-middle		15 lines lead upwards from the earth line below. They are continuous with the 15 lines of the top-middle.
Earth line	“TERRE”	This is a concave line annotated “Earth”. Along it are 15 points, four of which are marked with a dash. Each of the 15 lines referred to above leads up from one of these points.
Below the earth line	“Assemblés des croyants priant, envoyant leurs vibrations dans la direction de leur idéals”	“Gatherings of the praying believers, sending their vibrations in the direction of their ideals”

It is noteworthy that this diagram depicts only one “ideal”. It leaves open the question of how many “ideals” may subsist, according to Gurdjieff. Taking these two sources together, I would say that there are five essential theoretical elements to this exercise:

1. “Higher substances” form certain “reservoirs” above the earth.
2. The “higher substances” of those reservoirs are the results of emanations and vibrations which arise when people pray to the “ideal” who lived on the spot of the earth immediately below.²⁵
3. An exercitant can attract and ingest these materials by means of a connection.
4. The connection between the exercitant and the accumulations consists in a temporary thread formed by concentration.
5. Implicitly, it is an advantage for an exercitant, to be able to ingest these substances.

I suggest that there are three secondary theoretical elements:

6. The “ideal” “himself” indeed exists.
7. It is not enough to *ingest* the higher substances, if they are not calmly digested, the results of the exercise will be squandered.
8. The exercitant has an “atmosphere” around their body.

²⁵) I use both terms “emanations” and “vibrations” because Adie used both terms in these documents. Without going into the basis of the theoretical distinction in Gurdjieff’s thought, for him, all emanations are vibrations, but not all vibrations are emanations: see briefly Well-beloved, *Gurdjieff*, 57 and 139.

Point 6 is implicit in the statement that ‘the ideal himself is too far for an unprepared man to be able to enter into contact with him ...’. It is otherwise attested that Gurdjieff taught that each person has an “atmosphere” through which energies are received or lost.²⁶

1.5. Bennett on “Conscious Stealing” and “Lama”

The third direct piece of evidence for the FIE is the testimony of John G. Bennett. In the posthumously published *Sacred Influences* (1989), edited from miscellaneous materials by A.G.E. Blake, is the transcript of a talk given by Bennett on 14 May 1974, titled “Sacred Images”.²⁷ There, Bennett, speaking of the image which was produced by Thérèse of Lisieux’s (1873–1897) intense faith, love and conviction of her relationship with Jesus, said:

... Gurdjieff explains this to some extent in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, but he did it in much more detail when he was introducing an exercise that he called “conscious stealing”, which involved sacred images. He said that from time to time from another world—“from Above”—a Sacred Individual is incarnated in human form with a very high and special mission, the working out of which is not visible in this world and which can only be perceived by the disciples or companions who are specially prepared. ... We see that sacred image as the founder of a religion, as a prophet or as an incarnation of God ...²⁸

In *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (1973), Bennett said:

[Gurdjieff] certainly had a deep respect for Lamaism. In *Beelzebub’s Tales*, he asserts that a group of seven lamas possessed both knowledge and spiritual powers unparalleled elsewhere on earth, and that the accidental death of the chief of the group had destroyed one of the hopes of mankind. A further point is that in one of his most remarkable spiritual exercises Gurdjieff placed ‘Lama’ on the same footing as Muhammad, Buddha and Christ, and asserted that there was a special concentration of spiritual power in a certain place between Tibet and Afghanistan.²⁹

A question arises concerning “Lama” who lived above Tibet, and whose name Bennett placed in inverted commas, perhaps to indicate that while this is not a proper name, it does refer to a specific person. To scholars of religion, “Lama” *simpliciter*, unlike Muhammad, Buddha and Christ, is strictly a designation, not a proper name. Buddha (Awakened) and Christ (Anointed) are, of course, titles which often effectively serve as proper names. For the purpose of this study, there

²⁶ Claustres *La Prise 65 = Becoming Conscious*, 79.

²⁷ Bennett, *Sacred Influences*, 77–78 on the dating of the paper which is edited at 36–47.

²⁸ Bennett, *Sacred Influences*, 42–43.

²⁹ Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, 96.

is little benefit in expounding everything Gurdjieff had to say about “Saint Lama”. It suffices that Gurdjieff’s pupils would have understood “Lama” from Tibet to be the character known to them from the oral readings of *Beelzebub’s Tales*, which were a feature of life with Gurdjieff in his last years.³⁰ Neither is it germane to my task here to try and identify a specific historical person as being the original of Gurdjieff’s “Lama”.

The similarities between what Bennett says about this “spiritual exercise”, and what we have seen of the FIE is striking. The sole difference is that Bennett refers to the area between Tibet and Afghanistan, whereas the exercise, as Adie had it, mentions only Tibet. If Bennett was given an exercise other than the FIE which had these details, his account nonetheless strengthens the plausibility of attributing Adie’s exercise to Gurdjieff himself.

1.6. *Recollections of Gurdjieff’s Pupils*

This writer’s own personal enquiries of those who were with Gurdjieff proved unfruitful. In 1996, in the USA, I asked Annie-Lou Staveley (1906–1996),³¹ then about 90 years old but with a retentive memory and all her faculties, who had also received exercises from Gurdjieff, whether she had ever heard of this exercise. She said that she had not. She further added that it did not sound to her like a Gurdjieff exercise, but more like one of Bennett’s own devising. Staveley had reason to find the exercise redolent of Bennett, as I was later told that one of his pupils had taught her the “Conscious Stealing Exercise” (see below). However, it would appear, especially given Bennett’s note in *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, that the similarity between the FIE and the “Conscious Stealing Exercise” is more likely to be due to Gurdjieff’s common authorship than it is to Bennett’s invention. It seems that Gurdjieff gave exercises like “Conscious Stealing” and the “Four Ideals” to Bennett, but not to very many others. To be more precise, it seems to me that the general nature of the instruction was fairly widely circulated, but the technical details concerning attracting the higher substances, then ingesting and assimilating them, were passed to very few.

John Lester, also advised me, between 1996 and 1998, that he, too, had never heard of the FIE, but that it resembled the “Conscious Stealing Exercise” which he had been told Bennett had taught, presumably having learned it from Gurdjieff. According to Dr Lester, the exercise involved picturing to oneself four places of pilgrimage where the pilgrims’ prayers produce higher substances which

³⁰) See Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales*, 264, 697, 701, 705, 721 and 724.

³¹) On Staveley as a pupil of Gurdjieff, see Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 241–242.

accumulate over these sites (Jerusalem, Mecca, Benares on the Ganges, and the Potala). The exercitant then ingests those substances by fabricating a connection between their own body and the gathered substances, as in the FIE. The “Conscious Stealing Exercise” is the closest parallel to the FIE known to me. Like the FIE, it is not publicly available.

However, some published material in the public domain indirectly bears on the FIE and Adie’s diagram. The first of these is found in a posthumously edited selection of the autograph notes of one of Gurdjieff’s closest pupils, Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990),³² published under the title, *The Reality of Being* (2010). Although the journal entries which comprise this volume were written over a lengthy period of time, the book does not provide their dates. The pieces are edited and collated in such a way that, uninstructed by the editors’ foreword, one would think that the book was written as a unified whole. The foreword states that de Salzmann declared that she was writing a book, although what she left was rather: “... notebooks ... carefully preserved.”³³ There is no indication as to who edited them, or their procedure. The editors disclose that: ‘She often echoed, and sometimes repeated, his (i.e., Gurdjieff’s) exact words. ... No attempt has been made to identify isolated excerpts taken by her from Gurdjieff or other writers.’³⁴ Some of the material in *Reality of Being* is identical in every important aspect to what we have seen of our exercise. For example, de Salzmann writes:

Each person has an ideal, an aspiration for something higher. It takes one form or another, but what matters is the call to this ideal, the call of his being. Listening to the call is the state of prayer. While in this state, a man produces an energy, a special emanation, which religious feeling alone can bring.³⁵ These emanations concentrate in the atmosphere just above the place where they are produced. The air everywhere

³² For de Salzmann as a pupil of Gurdjieff, see Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 235.

³³ de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being*, xvi.

³⁴ de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being*, xvi and xviii. At xvi, they offer two examples of where de Salzmann repeats Gurdjieff’s words. An anonymous reviewer of this article correctly referred to the fact that although she stated that she was transmitting Gurdjieff’s teaching, de Salzmann in fact also used other teachings, partly as a means of establishing a framework in which Gurdjieff’s ideas and methods could be seen as “traditional”. The difficulty in knowing with the, in de Salzmann’s book, comes from Gurdjieff and what does not, is not that of the editors alone. Still, the similarities between these excerpts from *The Reality of Being* and the FIE is prima facie evidence that Gurdjieff was, at least in large part, their source. As we shall see below when we consider Kathryn Hulme’s “exercise”, Gurdjieff had previously taught this exercise to de Salzmann, and trusted her to repeat it to Hulme.

³⁵ The role of “religious emotion” in Gurdjieff’s system is a study in itself: it raises the question of the divisions of the centres. Here, de Salzmann is referring to the source of the energies in the “reservoir” to which the FIE makes reference.

contains them. The question is how to enter into contact with these emanations. By our call we can create a connection, like a telegraph wire, which links us, and take in this material in order to let it accumulate and crystallize in us. We then have the possibility to manifest its quality and help others understand—that is, to give it back. True prayer is establishing this contact and being nourished by it, nourished by this special material, which is called Grace. As an exercise for this, we breathe in air, thinking of Christ or Buddha or Mohammed, and keep the active elements that have been accumulated.³⁶

Other material in the book expresses similar ideas:

When I turn the attention of my thought to enter into contact with my body, my mind opens. The cells that vibrate are not the same as those engaged in my usual thinking. It is a part of the mind that can have a relation with a more subtle, pure energy. This is the energy of a higher level, which, Gurdjieff explained, is constituted by the real thought, the prayer, of certain beings. In order to have a connection with this level, I need a conduit, like a wire that reaches as high as my thinking allows. I can then take in, or rather suck in, the energy and let it pass through the connection.

De Salzmann adds that the connection is a “cosmic scale”, “a link connecting humanity with a higher influence.”³⁷ She locates the “meaning” of individual lives on this “scale”. That meaning is realised when a “current” and “magnetism” is established between each person and the “higher influences”. Making this connection is, she states, the aim of all “traditional ways”, which differ only because they had to correspond to people of different times and places.³⁸ The overlap between de Salzmann’s statements, taken together, and our exercise is substantial. De Salzmann’s accounts contain each of the essential five elements identified above: concept 1 (that higher substances form reservoirs above the earth), 3 and 4 (that the exercitant can absorb them by means of a connection), and, even more explicitly than Adie, 5 (that it is desirable to ingest these substances). In respect of concept 2 (that the substances are the products of prayer), de Salzmann states that while in a state of prayer, and *only* while experiencing a “religious feeling”, extraordinary emanations are produced and gather above the prayer site. Some higher substances, she asserts, are made by the “real thought” of “certain beings”.

There are also some differences between this and the exercise given to Adie, but only in minor respects. First, Adie’s exercise includes a reference to Lama, as well as Christ, Buddha and Mohammed, making four, not three ideals, for selection. However, there is no reason to think that the number of “ideals” is limited to four, for example, another of Gurdjieff’s exercises mention these four ideals and,

³⁶) de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being*, 198–199.

³⁷) de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being*, 199.

³⁸) de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being*, 199.

in addition, Moses. Second, de Salzmänn refers to assimilating these substances within the “active elements” of the air.³⁹

Another person who personally knew Gurdjieff and received instructions along these lines was Louise March (1900–1987), who knew Gurdjieff, on and off, over a period of twenty years.⁴⁰ In her posthumously edited and published recollections, she states that, after she had studied with Gurdjieff in France, children called her “Quiet Lady”, because she would sit ‘in stillness above the alcove on the second-story porch,’ each morning.⁴¹ This suggests that she had learned the Gurdjieff exercise which Adie called “the preparation”, and which was to be done at the start of each day. However, this is by no means certain, and there is no clue in the book as to what March did while she was sitting quietly. March also discloses that during the Christmas of 1948, while Gurdjieff was in New York:

After the dinner, around midnight, Gurdjieff gives advice. “I wish give *real* Christmas present. Imagine Christ. Somewhere in space *is*.” Mr Gurdjieff forms an oval with both his hands. “Make contact, but to outside, periphery. Draw from there, draw in, *I*. Settle in you, *Am*. Do every day. Wish to become Christ. Become. Be.”⁴²

This account emphatically affirms element 6 from the FIE, that the ideal itself actually does exist. Further, it seems to exploit the possibility hinted at in Adie’s text, that a prepared person could enter into contact with the ideal. It is noteworthy that Gurdjieff formed an oval with both his hands, and that Adie’s diagram also depicts an oval. Gurdjieff’s consistency may indicate that his instruction was not meant merely as a “true myth,”⁴³ but as literally accurate (which is not to say that the existence of the ideals is verifiable by us).

Frank Sinclair, co-president of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York from April 2000,⁴⁴ studied not with Gurdjieff himself but with Gurdjieff’s pupils, especially Jeanne de Salzmänn, Lord Pentland (1907–1984) and Martin Benson (d. 1971). He has published some material which throws light on how Gurdjieff brought a related exercise. The first reference in his volume comes from the edited memoirs of Beatrice Hastings, his wife, referring to Gurdjieff’s visit to the USA in 1948:

³⁹ The term “active elements” could shortly be explained as referring to fine substances in the air which can act as catalysts for spiritual development. These are “higher hydrogens” as referred to in 2.2.

⁴⁰ For March as a pupil of Gurdjieff, see Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 242.

⁴¹ McCorkle, *The Gurdjieff Years: Expanded*, 97.

⁴² McCorkle, *The Gurdjieff Years: Expanded*, 107.

⁴³ That is, a fiction which, if believed, is as effective as if it were true (e.g. imagining that you are sleeping on a pleasant beach, as a way of inducing sleep).

⁴⁴ Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 214–215.

At another time, at the end of movements, Gurdjieff said to the class, “At this time (around Christmas), many people pray. Their prayers go only so far up in the atmosphere. You can suck these into yourself; this force.”⁴⁵

Sinclair’s footnote observes that the audience for this advice comprised ‘both new and older people.’⁴⁶ There is no indication that Gurdjieff said how to do this. Sinclair also notes that Martin Benson, who knew Gurdjieff over a period of at least 20 years, said that Gurdjieff advised him: ‘Go to church, Benson, and *steal*. Their prayers will not reach God. Steal them.’⁴⁷ The advice is not dated, although in the footnote, Sinclair states that this “evidently predated” the advice given on Christmas Day 1948.⁴⁸ He does not say why he thought this to be “evident”. Sinclair later states that on Christmas 1948, in the Wellington Hotel, New York, Gurdjieff gave an exercise concerning one ideal, Christ. Citing three people who were present at that talk, Sinclair wrote that:

... they would recall his extraordinary injunction to go out and “draw in”, “steal”, or “suck in” the energies being poured out “by millions” of people in prayer, as on that Christmas. (My old notes reveal that ... Benson was drumming into me his account of how Gurdjieff had told him, “STEAL those energies, Benson, STEAL. Their prayers cannot reach God.” And in the way he spoke, I felt that those injunctions must have dated back to his time at the Prieuré, and not just to that Christmas Day.)

Inevitably, there were only partial recollections of that occasion. For instance, Louise March, German translator of *All and Everything*, displaying uncharacteristic sensitivity, ventured only a skeletal summary of his instruction.⁴⁹

Sinclair then quotes most of the passage from March to which I have referred. He continues:

... it would appear that Gurdjieff counseled his listeners to turn towards a point “somewhere in space”—someone even said he had referred to a planet, but clearly then, “above the head”, even perhaps “a higher part of the mind”—and consciously draw in a fine energy.⁵⁰

Sinclair goes on to say that in that session, Gurdjieff claimed to speak “as a Christ” and told people to undertake this exercise because only through it would they

⁴⁵) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 121 (the year) and 125.

⁴⁶) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 125 n. 5.

⁴⁷) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 146.

⁴⁸) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 157 n. 6.

⁴⁹) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 231.

⁵⁰) Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 230–231. Sinclair cites McCorkle, *The Gurdjieff Years*, 80.

“understand reason to live”,⁵¹ Sinclair’s account nowhere provides a firm date for the reception of this advice before the Christmas period of 1948. Sinclair’s “feeling” that the exercise was given in the 1920s is possibly a function of his desire to use the exercise as the “lynchpin” of his argument that Jeanne de Salzmann’s “new work”,⁵² was no innovation, but a continuation of Gurdjieff’s own methods.⁵³ However, the fact is that there is no evidence of Gurdjieff giving the exercise before October 1948 when he gave it to Adie.

The polymath Solange Claustres, who studied many exercises with Gurdjieff in the 1940s, records that at some point in his last ten years in Paris, Gurdjieff prepared a “groupe particulier” of fifteen people to whom he gave “des exercices intérieurs”. She describes the exercises as being:

He gave us inner exercises to be carried out at precise times and frequencies, during the day, and during the night, in a sustained progression consisting of consciously taken sensations—going deeper and deeper ... It was a very structured and strictly disciplined school. The group formed the essential foundation of G.’s teaching during this period of his life.⁵⁴

Claustres only gives details of one of these exercises. In 2007, in Paris, I described the FIE to her, and she replied that she had not been given it by Gurdjieff, and, indeed, had not previously known of the exercise. Claustres, did, however, recognise the “preparation” when I described that to her, and told me that the Adies had passed it on exactly as Gurdjieff had taught them. The special group had ceased, she said, before 1948, but not long before. Gurdjieff is not known to have used the concept of the “ideal” before the 1940s. This seems to be a further reason to date the FIE then. Indeed, there is very little evidence that Gurdjieff gave any exercises at all before the late 1930s. I shall review that evidence in a later article, but for now I note that although Bennett had studied under Gurdjieff in the 1920s, he only speaks of receiving exercises from him after he had re-established contact with him in 1948.

⁵¹ Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 232.

⁵² See Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 153–156.

⁵³ Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 7. Sinclair’s argument that de Salzmann’s line was continuous with Gurdjieff’s, because it was in line with this exercise, is an act of faith. He nowhere explicates what it was she said which corresponds to what Gurdjieff said in the Wellington Hotel.

⁵⁴ Claustres, *Becoming Conscious*, 89 = *La Prise*, 73: ‘... très précis dans le temps et la fréquence, pendant la journée et pendant la nuit, avec un cheminement très continu et très progressif de sensations prises consciemment—allant de plus en plus en profondeur ... C’était un école de discipline stricte et très structurée. Ce groupe a été la base essentielle de l’enseignement de G. à cet période de sa vie.’

It therefore seems more likely than not that Gurdjieff devised the FIE in 1948, and taught it to very few people (we know with certainty only of George Adie, and with a degree of probability, of J.G. Bennett and Jeanne de Salzmann). However, it also seems clear that Gurdjieff disseminated abbreviated or simplified versions of it, such as the “Conscious Stealing Exercise” and the New York 1948 instructions, but without instructions as to how to ingest, digest and assimilate the desired substances. It would, perhaps, be reasonable to see the FIE in the form given to Adie as one of Gurdjieff’s “subjective exercises”, but the instructions in New York, as an “objective exercise”.

Part Two: Gurdjieff’s System and “Ideals”

2.1. *Gurdjieff’s System: Four States of Consciousness*

The FIE is consistent with Gurdjieff’s general system of ideas and methods, and expands our understanding of it. To state the matter at its simplest, although it says nothing explicit about consciousness, the FIE fits into Gurdjieff’s thought, in that for Gurdjieff “human evolution” is the evolution of human consciousness, and can only be achieved by individuals. The evolution of consciousness is, I would suggest, implicitly the goal of the exercise. Therefore, when at the end of the FIE, Gurdjieff advises one to: ‘Rest contained so that your nature can assimilate in calmness the results deposited in you, which otherwise would be lost in vain,’ the benefit he envisages is probably the development of consciousness through the assimilation of “higher hydrogens” (see 2.2. below).

In his first systematic disclosures, in WWI Russia, Gurdjieff taught that human evolution is dependent upon, *inter alia*, the foods or substances a person digests, and in particular, for effective development, it is necessary to obtain more of the finer foods or substances.⁵⁵ When one obtains the finest substances, these can be alchemically transmuted into “higher bodies”, which serve as the platform for the work of functions which are rarely operative in people. It is through these functions that we come to be conscious of ourselves within reality, and then to directly perceive reality in the state Gurdjieff called “objective consciousness” (as to which, see below).

I shall briefly develop this in several stages. The first, perhaps foundational matter for Gurdjieff, is that the human body consists of seven “centres” or brains making one whole organism. Of the seven centres: five are “lower” and two

⁵⁵ Interestingly, Claudres remembers that Gurdjieff told them that they had to eat the most nourishing physical food: “Que nous devons manger des aliments de première qualité, riches en valeur nutritive et en vitamines.” Claudres, *La Prise*, 59 = *Becoming Conscious*, 73, where it is translated as: “That we should eat the best quality foods, nutritious and rich in vitamins.”

are “higher”. The five lower ones are observable. They comprise the intellectual, emotional, sexual, moving and instinctive centres. The instinctive centre deals with that work of the physical organism which does not have to be learned, and so usually does not need the awareness of the other four centres. In fact, operations governed by the instinctive centre often cannot be made conscious at all. Instinctive functions include the pumping of blood, the working of the hormonal system, the growth of the body and all its parts, etc. Some instinctive functions are amenable to a certain amount of intellectual interference, e.g., breathing, while others are not, e.g., the working of the liver. Moving centre functions are also physical functions, but these must be learned, e.g., walking, speaking and playing sports.

In addition, according to Gurdjieff, each person also possesses “higher emotional” and “higher intellectual” centres.⁵⁶ The two higher centres facilitate two rare states of consciousness: what he termed “self-remembering” and “objective consciousness.” For Gurdjieff, these are the two highest of four possible states of human consciousness. The first or lowest state, “sleep”, is self-explanatory. The fourth and highest, “objective consciousness”, is the only state in which we can ‘see things *as they are*’.⁵⁷ In between, there are two other states, “waking consciousness”, which is our usual waking state, in which our attention shifts between ourselves, externals and our reactions to internal and external stimuli. In the third state, “self-remembering”, the attention available in waking consciousness is clearer, more inclusive and “finer”, meaning more penetrating. At the present, according to Gurdjieff, we possess this third states only in flashes.⁵⁸ “Self-remembering” is one of Gurdjieff’s most individual contributions to esoteric lore.⁵⁹ He concisely described it as “consciousness of one’s own being”.⁶⁰ It is, briefly, the effort to divide one’s attention between oneself and one’s actions, thoughts, sensations and feelings, so that one becomes conscious of a greater number of one’s own psychic and organic functions and of their true nature. It

⁵⁶ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 142.

⁵⁷ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 141, retaining Ouspensky’s italics. I can find no more pithy and authoritative comment on these states of consciousness, as understood by Gurdjieff, than Ouspensky’s formulation: “When we become self-conscious, we become objective to ourselves, and in objective conscious (sic) we can know objective truth about everything.” Ouspensky, *Fourth Way*, 106. For a concise explanation of Gurdjieff’s theory of consciousness, so that the theory of different states of consciousness is put in context, see Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 39–40.

⁵⁸ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 141–142.

⁵⁹ See Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 187–189 and the material collected in Webb, *Harmonious Circle*, 146–148.

⁶⁰ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 141.

is significant partly because the habitual experience of the third state is the only way to be able to achieve moments of the state of objective consciousness, and to accurately remember anything of the objective reality we perceive in that state. This is perhaps the key to understanding the relation between Gurdjieff and mysticism, for, speaking of mystical experience, he said:

All mystical and occult systems recognize the existence of higher forces and capacities in man ... and speak of the necessity for *developing* the hidden forces in man. This present teaching differs from many others by the fact that it affirms that the higher centres exist in man and are fully developed. *It is the lower centres that are undeveloped.*⁶¹

In our usual state of consciousness, there is no connection between the higher and lower centres, and so we ‘fail to hear within us the voices which are speaking and *calling to us* from the higher emotional centre.’⁶² Were there a connection, one would experience: “new emotions, new impressions hitherto entirely unknown to him, for the description of which he has neither words nor expressions.”⁶³ Self-consciousness, or “self-remembering”, is a function of the operation of the higher emotional centre. The higher intellectual centre is still less accessible: it can be approached only through the higher emotional centre, and thus, in practice, through self-remembering. Rare as they are, connections to the higher intellectual centre are known to occur apart from the intentional cultivation of higher emotional centre, and when they do, they cause mystical and ecstatic states. Gurdjieff explained the circumstances of these random connections as follows:

These states can occur on the basis of religious emotions, or, for short moments, through particular narcotics; or in certain pathological states such as epileptic fits or accidental traumatic injuries ...⁶⁴

A longer connection with the higher intellectual centre usually results in a swoon. Importantly for this study, Gurdjieff then stated of such accidental connections that:

The mind refuses to take in the flood of thoughts, emotions, images, and ideas which suddenly burst into it. And instead of a vivid thought, or a vivid emotion, there results, on the contrary, a complete blank, a state of unconsciousness. The memory retains only the first moment when the flood rushed in on the mind and the last moment when the flood was receding and consciousness returned. But even these moments are so full of unusual shades and colours that there is nothing with which to compare them among

⁶¹) Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 194.

⁶²) Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 195.

⁶³) Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 194.

⁶⁴) Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 195.

the ordinary sensations of life. This is usually all that remains from so-called ‘mystical’ and ‘ecstatic’ experiences, which represent a temporary connection with a higher centre. Only very seldom does it happen that a mind which has been better prepared succeeds in grasping and remembering something of what was felt and understood at the moment of ecstasy. But even in these cases, the thinking, the moving, and the emotional centres remember and transmit everything in their own way, translate absolutely new and never previously experienced sensations into the language of everyday sensations, transmit in worldly three-dimensional forms things which pass completely beyond the limits of worldly measurements ...⁶⁵

Gurdjieff is saying, in short, that the source of mystic experiences is found in certain “higher brains” which we all possess, and which are able to directly perceive reality. The reason we are usually unaware either of objective reality or of the existence of these brains in us is that the ordinary mind we use is not capable of entering into connection with the higher brains without the preparation provided by spiritual disciplines, or by one of the random occurrences Gurdjieff was quoted as referring to. Even if such a connection does take place by accident (e.g. as a result of head trauma), we then understand what is higher in terms of what is lower. This explanation has the virtue of being systematic and internally consistent, even if it is impossible to assess its correctness.

2.2. *Gurdjieff’s System: “Higher Hydrogens”*

For Gurdjieff, the evolution of consciousness requires finer foods. Our highest states of consciousness require foods of a finer type than those we need for our lower states. Foods comprise, according to Gurdjieff, a much greater range of substances than we ordinarily think. Part of the significance of the “FIE” is that it widens still further our understanding of what Gurdjieff considered to be available as food. Briefly, for Gurdjieff, the material universe (not excluding the possibility of something in the universe which is not material)⁶⁶ is composed of interpenetrating substances or “hydrogens” of increasing density. Although there are more hydrogens in the universe, Gurdjieff said that, for all our purposes, it was sufficient to take 12 of these hydrogens, which he designated as H1, H6,

⁶⁵ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 195.

⁶⁶ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 82 is very careful in its wording: “We take the three-dimensional universe and consider the world as a world of *matter* and *force* in the simplest and most elementary meaning of these terms. Higher dimensions ... as well as other categories of knowledge of the world which are unknown to science, we will discuss later.” Gurdjieff’s reported exposition of the “ray of creation” is marked by his selection of deliberately selects only one “ray:” from the possibly infinite number which are created by the Absolute, *ibid* 80–81.

H12, H24, H48, H96, H192, H384, H768, H1536 & H3072. Each hydrogen comprises a “category of matter”, embracing various objects, some of which are known to us, for example, wood is composed of H1536, while the substances which serve as food for us are H768.⁶⁷ Each organic creature or body is also a composite of hydrogens of varying density. These hydrogens are all material, and have both chemical and psychic attributes. The materiality and thus the quality of each hydrogen is different: for example, air and wood each possess properties which the other does not.

In about 1918, Gurdjieff said that humans feed upon three foods: solid nourishment (food and water, which, for these purposes, Gurdjieff treated as one class); air; and impressions. These three foods are “hydrogens” 768, 192 and 48 respectively.⁶⁸ He stated that although all hydrogens with the significant exception of H1 could be found in the human body,⁶⁹ the higher hydrogens (i.e., those with lower numbers, H48, H24 etc.) were “matters unknown to physics and chemistry, matters of our psychic and spiritual life on different levels.”⁷⁰ In adumbrating the ideas which culminated in the “Food Diagram” in its classical completed form,⁷¹ Gurdjieff indicated that, by a special alchemical work, the three foods could be developed further than they usually are. According to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff stated that a person usually does not have enough energy to attain the aims they set themselves. For Gurdjieff, the only worthwhile aim to start with is “self-remembering”. At a later date, Gurdjieff went on to say that one of the reasons we cannot “remember ourselves” is that:

The human organism represents a chemical factory planned for the possibility of a very large output. But in the ordinary conditions of life the output of this factory never reaches the full production possible to it ... all its elaborate equipment actually serve no purpose at all, ... it maintains only with difficulty its own existence.

It must follow that if exercitants can attract and feed on higher substances, the Food Diagram of *In Search of the Miraculous* must be incomplete, as the “emanations” produced by prayer cannot easily be accommodated to any concept of “impressions” without stretching that word beyond any reasonable meaning.

⁶⁷ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 172–175. As Ouspensky notes, water and liquid foods are in fact H384, but for simplicity, all solid edible and potable foodstuffs are taken as H768.

⁶⁸ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 181–190.

⁶⁹ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 174.

⁷⁰ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 175.

⁷¹ Figure 39: Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 182.

2.3. Gurdjieff on Prayer and “Ideals”

According to the transcript of a meeting in Paris of 7 December 1941, someone asked Gurdjieff how he should pray. Gurdjieff replied, *inter alia*, that certain substances emanate from the sun and planets.⁷² These emanations, he said, make contact at certain points in our solar system, and can reflect in materialized images which are themselves images of the All Highest. There are always, he averred, materialized images in the atmosphere, and if only we could sufficiently concentrate, we could enter into contact with the image and receive the substances. There is a significant difference between this and the FIE, for in 1941 Gurdjieff was referring to emanations from the bodies of the solar system. FIE, on the other hand, refers to emanations sourced from the faithful. However, what was said in this meeting of 7 December 1941 is of interest in that it suggests a basis, in Gurdjieff’s thought, for asserting the objective reality of “ideals” which subsist somewhere above the surface of the earth.

Gurdjieff advised his students to have an ideal: for example, in the meeting of 16 January 1944, he stated, if one does not have an ideal, if one does not believe in God, then one’s parent or teacher can serve as an ideal.⁷³ On 9 December 1946, Gurdjieff advised that when finishing an exercise one could make a prayer to one’s ideal to help guard what one has received or attracted until the next exercise.⁷⁴ It is possible that Gurdjieff’s theory can be accommodated within the framework of traditional Christianity (e.g., the receipt of the “higher substances” corresponds to the receipt of divine grace), although this too, is a topic for a later study.⁷⁵ However, the significant point is that as the exercises are aimed at conscious development, they will—or should—make possible a connection between higher and lower centres, and thus for the states which are experienced as “mystical” to become “natural” for the exercitant. This is further reason to see Gurdjieff’s system as fundamentally mystical, as it has elsewhere been argued.⁷⁶

Another aspect of the FIE’s prayer-like nature is that religiosity is not usually associated with Gurdjieff. But the impression of Gurdjieff’s a-religiosity is superficial. His music and his movements are replete with the conventionally

⁷² Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, 2–3. Similarly, see Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales*, 760–761.

⁷³ Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, 106.

⁷⁴ Gurdjieff, *Transcripts*, 173.

⁷⁵ I am aware that there are significant differences between Gurdjieff’s ideas and those found in Christianity, but that is not my topic here.

⁷⁶ Azize, ‘Solar Mysticism in Gurdjieff’, *passim*. Despite the many diverse methods which Gurdjieff used, the writer is here referring to the system as a whole: ideas and techniques considered as leading to an end.

religious: much of his piano music bears titles such as “Essentuki Prayer”, “The Story of the Resurrection of Christ”, or “Reading from a Sacred Book”. There are even pieces with titles such as “Vespers Hymn” and “Tibi Cantamus”. There are two entire series of piano music named “Hymns from a Truly Great Temple” and “Sacred Hymns”, respectively. The solemnity and gravity of these pieces is apparent. Then there are movements with titles such as “The Big Prayer”, and “Sense of the Sacred”. During the latter, the pupils invoke the names of the four ideals. One cannot say much about this wordless teaching, but it exists and is an important part of Gurdjieff’s heritage.⁷⁷ Nowhere in any of Gurdjieff’s or Ouspensky’s books, or in the transcripts of Paris meetings, does Gurdjieff say or is he quoted as saying that prayer is ineffectual, let alone that one should not pray. On the contrary, he actually and explicitly gave instruction in how to pray and enjoined it.⁷⁸ In *In Search of the Miraculous*, Gurdjieff is reported as saying that the action of conscious praying could itself do for the person what they sought from a higher power.⁷⁹ In other words, prayer is one of Gurdjieff’s methods.

What is striking about some of Gurdjieff’s methods, is how he uses imagination, although he considered uncontrolled imagination to be one of the signs of “waking sleep”. Gurdjieff evidently considered that imagination could be used constructively, even if it was rarely used in that manner. Thus, in a talk dated to 19 December 1930, Gurdjieff stated:

... as a means for self-perfecting a man can use a certain property which is in his psyche, and which is even of a very negative character. This property ... is none other than that which I have many times condemned and which people themselves consider an unworthy manifestation for a man who has reached responsible age ... and it is called “self-deception”.⁸⁰

There are indications that imagination could be very different in its significance for a person and their conscious development, depending on whether it was intentional and controlled or unintentional and uncontrolled.⁸¹ The FIE must, it is submitted, be taken as one of those rare examples where Gurdjieff recommended the use of intentional and controlled imagination. Another such example, which also takes us into the area of magic is found in Kathryn Hulme’s (1900–1981) memoir *Undiscovered Country: In Search of Gurdjieff* (1966).

⁷⁷ See Petsche, ‘G.I. Gurdjieff’s Piano Music’, and her forthcoming *Music for Remembering: The Gurdjieff/de Hartmann Piano Music and its Esoteric Significance*.

⁷⁸ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 300–302, and see also the references in Well-beloved, *Gurdjieff*, 166–167.

⁷⁹ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 300–302.

⁸⁰ Gurdjieff, *Life Is Real*, 133.

⁸¹ Ouspensky, *The Fourth Way*, 370–371.

Reporting meetings with Gurdjieff in 1949, Hulme speaks of Gurdjieff's references to "conjury" as being something which one does for one's own benefit, and which has that effect not because it is magic but because the person themselves did it.⁸² However, the exercise which Gurdjieff gave her later that year when her mother had started to suffer from dementia was intended to work for the benefit of her mother as well. Hulme states:

He went to his trunk, took from it a postcard-sized photograph of a strong-faced old lady in a black head shawl and cape ... "My mother," he said. He then gave me an exercise, totally different from any previous instruction yet including steps from many of the earlier "spiritual" disciplines. I must always be alone in a room when I performed it, alone with two empty chairs before me, on which I was to see "with inner eye" his mother and my mother sitting side by side. Step by step, he went through the instruction which, I gathered, might enable me to draw into myself a force to send to them—a kind of "help" for his mother and mine. Then he called Madame S., his oldest and most trusted Russian assistant, told her to go over it once again, step by step with me, and abruptly left the room.

It was the last exercise he was ever to give to me.⁸³

The parallel to the FIE consists in the fact that she would draw into herself "a force". But then, this exercise goes beyond the FIE in that she would send it on to both her mother and Gurdjieff's. At this point, we are looking at something which most scholars would probably consider to be magic or at least akin to it: the hardest question is probably one of definition.

Part Three: Conclusion

Gurdjieff's "Four Ideals Exercise" would seem to be unique. The chief aim of this paper has been to publish the exercise with the necessary notes to make it comprehensible in its own terms, and to relate it to Gurdjieff's own system. The process of showing its consistency with Gurdjieff's ideas and methods also presents those in a fresh light. The exercise shows Gurdjieff making use of religious concepts but recasting them; almost, in fact, materialising them. Although the "substances" of which Gurdjieff speaks are, in his scheme of the universe, subtle substances, they are, nonetheless material substances. Likewise, the notion that when people pray they emanate a refined substance which ascends above the earth is, to the best of my knowledge, unique and reframes received religious ideas in a novel manner.

⁸²) Hulme, *Undiscovered Country*, 278–279.

⁸³) Hulme, *Undiscovered Country*, 284–285.

Apart from exhibiting the connection between religion and Gurdjieff's system, especially perhaps in its later stages, this article seeks to draw attention to Gurdjieff's use of "internal contemplative exercises". As we have seen, there are in fact some references in the extant literature to these exercises. The first publication of a full exercise occurred in 1975 with Gurdjieff's *Third Series*, published under the title *Life is Real, Only Then, When 'I Am'*. As stated, it is my intention to follow this paper up with more studies of these exercises. That research may lead to a rather different, more nuanced picture of Gurdjieff emerging: the fiery teacher of "dervish dances" was but one role he played. Gurdjieff was also a teacher of a unique form of contemplation which was grounded upon an extensive and internally-consistent theory.

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Appendices 1-4

The reproductions of all four appendices are published by kind permission of the trustees of the late George Adie. The originals are in the possession of the author.

Appendix 1

Obverse of Adie's notes, handwritten in 1949, concerning the time spent with Gurdjieff in Paris, and the exercise Gurdjieff gave him.

1 year
Ten visits
11 weeks or 75 days
2 1/2 months
1/8 of the time.

29 Aug 48 to Sept. 1 1949.

Oct 1. 48. Pulisde Exercise 4 hours. 5 months
to Mch. 49. Also "I.A.M." Humpstead. 2 1/2 months.
(Helen 20/3/49).

April 24. Correct State. 4 1/2 months. to Sept. 1. 1949.
" 24. Totes every 3rd day. 1 month [6 May Complete Surrender]
May 17. " Strengthened (+ oversteer?) 3 weeks.
(Helen told 20/3/49)

June 7. P.P. 4 3 weeks to July 2
(£1300 June 9th)
Notes started June 10th.

July 2. 1. Totes + Scott 2 P.P. + important.
Continued 9 weeks.
[in use 4 1/2 months Dill's].
(£1000 July 4th)

Went Paris July 31. returned Aug 3
" Aug. 18. " Aug 28
" Sept. 2. " Sept 5

Appendix 2

Reverse of Adie's notes, handwritten in 1949, concerning the time spent with Gurdjieff in Paris, and the exercises Gurdjieff gave him.

visit Paris. 29 Aug. 1948.
 Ten visits 75 days. 11 weeks 2 1/2 months
 1/5 whole time
 to Sept 1. 1949.

Oct. 1. 1948. subjective ex. till Nov. 1
 Jan. 1949. Dec 48 to 14th 49. (H 2)

24/April. Collect stats. Testos & ascorbic
 every 3rd day
 Continued to May 17 (1 month) (A for 20/5/)
 Has pills strengthened.
 Continued to June 7 (2 weeks)
 P. changed to ①
 started Notes June 10.
 Continued 3 weeks to July 2
 new course. 1 P. 2 P. inject. Testosterone.
 Continued 9 weeks.

Appendix 3

Page 1 of the typed version of Gurdjieff's Four Ideals Exercise, with handwritten corrections by Adie and Helen Adie.

On earth all people have an ideal which they situate far off in space, high above themselves. Towards this ideal they send their emanations. They pray to it, they stretch towards it, their emanations mount towards it. ^{their} emanations do not all have the same force. Some of them can hardly rise at all, others go further, further even than the atmosphere of the earth, yet others mount almost to the very ideal.

The emanations on leaving the earth are dispersed, then they mount, further on they collect together to form at a certain level above the atmosphere of the earth a sort of reservoir or foyer of substances.

We represent to ourselves that that this foyer of substances is situated midway between the point of concentration which represents the ideal of the believers, and the earth and the ideal himself is too far for an unprepared man to be able to enter into contact with him, but the man can, if he tries with determination to enter into contact with this foyer of substances formed from the concentration of the vibrations sent by the believers towards their ideal and the man can assimilate these substances and accumulate them in himself. He can do it by establishing through the concentration of his will a connection in the form of a line or thread between this foyer and ^{some} part or other of his own body.

The exercise is given to achieve this aim;

We chose four ideals :

Mahomet Christ Buddha Lama

We represent that their essence exists somewhere in space, in a place situated above the country where they lived.

Mahomet above Mecca and Medina

Christ above Jerusalem

Buddha above India

Lama above Tibet.

In representing to ourselves each of these ideals, the thought goes immediately in the direction in space where the ideal is situated.

The exercise consists in establishing a contact between one of the ^{limbs} ~~parts~~ of the body and the foyer of substances formed by the vibrations of the faithful in the direction of the ideal.

Appendix 4

Adie's French language sketch, probably made in 1949, of the cosmology of Gur-djieff's Four Ideals Exercise.

